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(Jersey City, NJ) - After touring the Jersey City Medical Center, a facility which provides medical services to a large population of uninsured children, U.S. Reps. Frank Pallone, Jr. (D-NJ) and Albio Sires (D-NJ) today said they are working in Washington to strengthen the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP), known in New Jersey as FamilyCare, so that it would reach thousands of more uninsured children in New Jersey.

The lawmakers were joined by Jersey City Medical Center President Stephen Kirby, Jersey City Medical Center Chief Medical Officer Dr. Robert P. Jacobs, and two home healthcare workers who, despite working full time in the health care field, have been unable to secure medical insurance for themselves or their children. The workers are members of the Service Employees International Union (SEIU).

The two New Jersey lawmakers said Congress will soon consider legislation that would strengthen SCHIP in order to provide health coverage to millions of children who are currently eligible for the program but, for whatever reason, are not enrolled. Here in New Jersey, 264,000 children are uninsured, but 83-percent of them are eligible for FamilyCare. Pallone, who chairs the House Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Health, is charged with writing the legislation that would allow for a possible \$50 billion funding increase in the program to reach many of these children. He expects to move a bill through committee next month.

"Due to rapidly rising health care costs, insurance coverage is increasingly out of reach for many hard working American families," Pallone said. "These families should not be forced to face uncertainty from day to day, hoping and praying that their health holds out. We are working hard to dramatically strengthen SCHIP so we can offer these families a way to obtain insurance for their children and the peace of mind that comes with it."

"Many low income families benefit from Medicaid while others have health plans through their employment," said Congressman Sires. "Thousands of families are stuck in the middle; parents making too much income to qualify for Medicaid and too little to buy health insurance. These are the children that can benefit from SCHIP. In the long run, adequate healthcare for children will save money with the results being healthy, well-developed children that are an asset to society."

Both Pallone and Sires lauded the recent passage of a Democratic budget, which included a \$50 billion increase in funds for SCHIP over the next five years. The lawmakers noted this increase, of which New Jersey is expected to receive over \$1 billion, would assist the state in improving outreach and enrollment for children who are eligible but not yet participating.

"Too often, insurance determines whether children receive the medical care they need. Children who are not covered by insurance often have unmet medical needs and are likely to end up in the emergency department with conditions that could have been avoided," said Kirby, of Jersey City Medical Center, where more than 1,000 children have been enrolled in

SCHIP in the past two years. "The SCHIP program is vital to parents and their children. We applaud congressmen Sires and Pallone for their work to preserve this lifeline to meet medical needs."

Diawanti Mohabir, an uninsured healthcare worker joined the legislators. "My daughter has a painful toothache and I don't have an extra \$150 to pay the doctor," said Diawanti. "It's a nightmare and it's making me sick!" Mohabir is a member of SEIU 1199 New Jersey and works as a home health aide at Metropolitan home care agency in Jersey City.

"Diawanti and her husband work fulltime yet they still have a hard time making ends meet, reauthorizing SCHIP helps thousands of hard working families like them provide their children with the medical attention they need," said Milly Silva, President of SEIU 1199 New Jersey. "Congressmen Albio Sires and Frank Pallone are doing a good thing for people who work so hard yet can't afford medical care."

SCHIP is a partnership between the state and federal government to provide health insurance to children and in some states, including New Jersey, their low-income parents who work full time but do not receive health insurance through their jobs. The program, created ten years ago, now provides health coverage to 6 million children nationwide, including over 125,000 New Jersey children. Unlike some states, which only extend coverage to children, New Jersey's FamilyCare program provides coverage to over 70,000 uninsured low-income parents, and guardians of children who are 18 or younger.

Jersey City Medical Center has the second largest number of uninsured patients in New Jersey, and the highest percentage of uninsured patients combined.

SEIU Health Care, the 1 million member union of health care workers who are fighting for health care for all.

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